

# Mystique Of Kathak On The Ghats Of Benaras

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Meenakshi Kumar

ADITI MANGALDAS is in a tearing hurry. She has to rush for the dress rehearsals for *The Fakir Of Benares*, the first-ever Indo-French opera which opens to the audience on March 1. The kathak dancer, who presents a small dance recital in the opera, is excited. Finally, she will get to see her costume, designed by Meera Ali. All that she knows so far about it, is that it is in black with a blue *churidar*. "Oh, I don't have to worry about what it'll be like," she says, "Both Meera and Muzaffar Ali are so good with what they do."

She is also excited about her being part of this musical extravaganza. When Francis Wacziarg, the producer of the opera, approached her with the story, she was immediately able to visualise herself dancing on the banks of the Benares ghats. "If it is Benares, it has to be kathak," says the 41-year-old Mangaldas, the artistic director and principal dancer of the Drishtikon Dance Foundation.

The piece that she presents in the opera, co-sponsored by *Hindustan Times*, is about a group of dancers on the banks of the Ganges who are immersed in dancing. Unfortunately, the lead dancer, played by Mangaldas, breaks her ankle. When she returns after her wound has healed, she dances in abandon. "The song had all the *shringaar raas* and I thought it was a great opportunity to put traditional kathak imageries to it," explains Mangaldas.

What really attracted her to the opera was the challenge of dancing with a whole orchestra. "In Kathak recitals, we have few instruments but here I am dancing to the sounds of 50 different musical instruments and believe me, the effect is amazing."

A great supporter of contemporary dance (she hates it to be called fusion), she has recently returned from Kolkata after participating in the



Kathak diva Aditi Mangaldas presents a dance recital in *The Fakir Of Benares*, the first ever Indo-French opera, on March 1

PHOTO: SUNIL SAXENA

Uday Shankar Festival where she presented an item with no sound at all. "It was the most challenging task of creating the feeling of perceived music," she says.

After the Jahan-e-Khusrau festival next week, where she once again has an interesting item, Mangaldas will be off for Birmingham, to work with dancers not trained in kathak. What with so much on her plate, no wonder, she is in a tearing hurry. ■

## City Buzz...



IT WAS composed by Leo Ma'ual way back in 1922, successfully performed in Paris later and much to everyone's surprise just as easily forgotten. "The Fakir of Benares" is no ordinary tale. The story of love, beauty and how humans often connect the two, the play has received acclaim world over.

An Indo-French Opera directed by Muzaffar Ali, the presentation will be conducted by Frederic Ligier with the Delhi Symphony Orchestra and the Capital City Minstrels this coming Friday and Saturday at the Siri Fort auditorium at 7 p.m. Sunday will see a Bharatanatyam performance "Kashi Yatra" by Malavika Sarukkai at 7 p.m. at the same venue.

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